

# Letter from Taizé

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## A month before the European meeting in Prague

In a few weeks, the European meeting will be held here. During the time of preparation, visits and prayers have taken place throughout the city and its surroundings. Doors opened quickly in parishes and families.

At a time when Czechoslovakia is in the process of reconstruction, the meeting takes on a new significance. This was explained by a couple, the parents of seven children, who meet with other couples every two weeks to pray and read the Bible together:

"Last November, we thought we had arrived in the promised land: now we realize that we have just left Egypt, and we still have to cross the desert to reach the promised land."

"This meeting is coming at the right time for us: to welcome all those who want to come, we must begin by opening ourselves to those who live close to us, those we were afraid of and never dared to tell that on Sundays we used to go across town to go to church. It means no longer being afraid of our fellow workers, but daring to speak to them and trust them."

### A process of inner reconstruction

Many people share this concern. They know that not only does an economic reconstruction need to be accomplished, but also a process of inner reconstruction. President Havel expresses this well, "The only place I can begin is with myself. It depends on me, and me alone, whether everything is lost or not" (Letter from prison).

"We have a lot to learn from you (...); but we can offer you something: our experience and what we have learned from it."

"The experience I am talking about has given me a certainty: consciousness precedes being, and not vice versa. Because of this, the salvation of our human family lies nowhere else but in the human heart, in our ability to reflect, in humility and in human responsibility" (Speech to the US Congress).

### The joy of hospitality and of meeting

Already in the preliminary meetings for the preparation, in Prague and in the rest of the country, the quality of the searching was evident. Prayer is always at the heart of these meetings, and there is the joy of welcoming one another and of meeting in small groups. This is already an anticipation of what the European meeting will bring: the joy of being together and reflecting together. □







*«I am  
the vine,  
you are  
the branches»*

## four prayers

It is above all in prayer that groups all over Europe are preparing themselves for the Prague European Meeting.

Each person, as a pilgrim, can open themselves to listen to God's call: "Get up, walk..." (Matt 9.5). In prayer, on the way with Christ, it is granted to us to be with him, to welcome him.

For this station of the pilgrimage before Prague, here are elements to be the basis of prayer together. There are four outlines which can be used in various ways: choose one if there is just one preparatory meeting, more if there are several; taken together, the four could be a framework for a nightlong vigil; the last one can be used for the prayer of departure — such a prayer will be held in many towns, gathering both those who are leaving for Prague and those who join in the spirit of their pilgrimage.

"I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15): praying and meditating upon these words of Jesus means entering more deeply into that mystery of communion which is the Church.

"Christ dwells in the Church, and the Church is the mystery of Christ living and acting among us." The Church, as the place of a unique communion, is called to bear witness - to make the light of the Risen Christ visible, and this is the central theme of these prayers.

**I**f you were not risen, Lord Christ, to whom would we go to discover the radiance of God's face? If you were not risen, we would not be together, searching for your communion, and we would not find in you the cool flowing waters of forgiveness. If you were not risen, where would we draw the energies to follow you to the very end of our lives, to choose you again and yet again?

p r a y e r   b y   B r o t h e r   R o g e r



Photos: Sabine Nitzschke, Dresden



# Remain in me

1

# One body

2

# Peace for you all

3

# Go to the vineyard

4

## **Psalm 86**

(Hear, O Lord, and answer me...)

between the verses, sing:  
Misericordias Domini in  
aeternum cantabo

## **Reading**

Paul wrote: As a prisoner in the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be perfectly humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4, 1-6)

## **Chant**

Bless the Lord

## **Silence**

## **Text for meditation**

Christ is communion. Will you live a life rooted, not in Christ taken in isolation, but in the Risen Lord present on earth in the communion of his Body, his Church? When the Church is radiant with a mystery of forgiveness and motherly love, it is a transparent reflection of Christ Jesus.

In that unique communion called the Church, oppositions both age-old and new are tearing apart the Body of Christ. Reconciliation makes us fully consistent with the Gospel... and in that way a ferment of peace and trust is offered to the entire human family.

(Brother Roger, No Greater Love, Sources of Taizé)

## **Chant**

Confitemini

Praying around the Cross, we remain alongside Christ who loved us to the very end, in order to gather together the scattered children of God.

## **Chant**

Domine Deus, Filius Patris,  
dona nobis pacem

## **Reading**

Christ is our peace. Through the cross, he put to death hostility. He came to proclaim peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. Through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

As a result you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him too you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit.

(Eph 2, 16-22)

## **Chant**

Crucem tuam

## **Silence**

## **Prayer around the Cross**

The icon of the cross is placed on the floor so that those who wish may approach it.

## **Chant**

Adoramus te, O Christe /  
Stay with me... / Ubi  
caritas / Nada te turbe /  
Oculi nostri

## **Chant**

Bonum est confidere

## **Reading**

Jesus said, "The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them to the vineyard. He went out again about the ninth hour and found others standing there, doing nothing. He said to them, you also go and work in my vineyard." (Matt 20, 1...7)

## **Chant**

Wait for the Lord

## **Silence**

During the silence, each person can write a prayer intention to respond to Christ's call:

"You also go and work in my vineyard." To what situations does Christ send me? What does he give me so that I can bear fruit?

These intentions can be given to individuals or to religious communities so that they can pray for them during the days of the meeting in Prague.

Prayer of intercession for the city and for the world, with Kyrie eleison after each petition. After the prepared intentions, some of the ones written down during the silence can be used.

## **Lord's Prayer**

## **Final prayer or blessing**

for the departure  
for Prague

## **Chant**

El Senyor /  
Meine Hoffnung /  
In the Lord...

## **Chant**

Laudate omnes gentes

## **Reading**

"Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as the branch can bear no fruit unless it remains on the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. All who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit, for without me you can do nothing." (John 15.4-5)

## **Chant**

Ubi caritas

## **Silence**

## **Text for meditation**

The Risen One comes to wrest you away from loneliness by letting you rely on the trusting of his witnesses, from Mary and the apostles up to those of today. So this can be your prayer: "Lord Christ, enable me to be alive in this mystery of communion that is the Church; enable me day after day to dispose myself inwardly to place my trust in the Mystery of Faith. O Christ, do not look on my sins, but on the faith of your Church." (Brother Roger, Letter from Ethiopia)

## **Chant**

Cantate Domino



# Church, icon of the Trinity

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*The following text continues the reflection that took place last summer at Taizé in the groups deepening their knowledge of the Bible. Andrej Rublev's icon of the Trinity served as a basis for deepening our comprehension of God's love for us. The icon also sends us back to ourselves and invites us to become an image of that love.*

In his well-known icon of the Holy Trinity, Andrej Rublev helps us enter into the heart of the fathomless mystery of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And it is not an accident that he does this by the image of a meal shared by the three angels around the table.

In the Bible, a meal is much more than some food that we take to nourish ourselves. It signifies a relationship: those who eat together express in that way that they belong to the same "family". A meal is an ideal symbol of fellowship, of communion with God and among human beings, of a shared life. Thus, when a prophet wishes to evoke the end of the ages, he describes God giving a great banquet on Mount Zion, to which all the nations are invited (Isa 25,6-9).

And often Jesus, in his parables, speaks about a meal or a banquet: for his hearers, these were obvious images of the Kingdom of God. The Book of Revelation likewise describes the end of history as "the wedding feast of the Lamb" (Rev 19,6-9; cf. 3,20); here, the image of a meal is joined to that of a wedding to express the relationship between God and redeemed humanity.

By inviting us to take our place at the table for a meal with the three angels, the icon tells us that God offers us something even greater than healing for our wounds and the entry into a new life.

God invites us to participate in his own common life, to enter into the communion of the Trinity, symbolized by the circle formed by the three angels. This is truly something beyond all our hopes and imaginings (cf. 1 Cor 2,9; Eph 3,19; 1 John 3,2). By the coming of Christ Jesus, by the gift of his love, of his Spirit, we enter "the Father's house" (cf. John 14,2), the fullness of the divine communion.

When we take our place at that table prepared for us (Ps 23), when we open ourselves to the gift of God, when we welcome God's love so that it can bear fruit in our lives, then we become an image of God for others. In other words, our calling as Christians is nothing other than to be an icon of the Trinity! For this reason, faith can never be an individualistic attitude: it makes us part of a community, what the New Testament calls the Church, the assembly of believers. Only together can we be an image of God who is Trinity.

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Just before his death, Jesus prayed for his disciples still in the world (John 17). He asked his Father to keep them "in his Name", in other words in his being, in his love (17,11). And to do this, so that they would be one with the same unity that exists between the Father and the Son, so that they would share their fellowship. A little later (17,20-23), Jesus explains why: "so that the world may believe... so that the world may know...". The unity of love between believers is the sign that in them God is present and active in the midst of our world.

In John 13, the same thing is expressed in a more active way, by the "new commandment" of love (13,34-35). If the disciples live out that love between them (and without excluding anyone else), "all will know" that here there is something more than just a simple human group. The commandment is new because we are told to love as Christ loved us: more than an order from without, it is Christ's gift to us. That is why, in these chapters, Jesus speaks several times about the Spirit he will send to his disciples to support them on their pilgrimage (14,16ff; 15,26; 16,7ff).

How can we be an icon of the Trinity? Chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles describes the "birth" of the Church, and in so doing provides us with some guidelines. It begins with the event of Pentecost, a Jewish feast of the covenant, of the gift of the Law on Sinai. Here, though, it is not a simple recollection of the past: something new happens which brings the past to life and goes even further.

The apostles receive the Holy Spirit, God's Law written henceforth in the hearts of the faithful. And the first sign of the Spirit's presence is unity: each person understands the same message in their own language. All do not speak the same language; the diversity of gifts is maintained but is at the service of a wider communion (cf. 1 Cor 12-13).

Next, Peter explains to the crowd the meaning of the event and invites them to join the apostles. The Church is an open community and not a closed circle of people who all think the same way. The icon shows this by the empty place in the front, just as Jesus did when he sat at table with the outcasts of society, those who were considered furthest away from God (Matt 9,10ff; cf. Luke 14,12ff). Then, the end of the chapter (Acts 2,42-47) depicts the first Christians as a community that prays and shares, that returns constantly to the wellsprings of love to communicate that love to others in the concrete events of daily life.

In the icon of the Trinity, all three angels hold in their hand a pilgrim's staff. To be an icon of the pilgrim God, the Church also must be on the move. In the Acts of the Apostles, we sometimes see the believers all gathered together in one place, and at other times we see them on the road. These two dimensions should always be a part of Christian life. We are called to come together to pray and share, and then to set out to communicate, sometimes through a simple presence, what we have received.



These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

## January

## Meditating on the word

## Johannine Hours

Isaiah 60,1-5

*Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow.*

*Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.*

**Tue** Jn 15.9-13 • **Ga 4.4-7**

God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father!"

**Wed** Jn 1.19-28 • **Is 61.10-11**

I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me in garments of salvation and wrapped me in a mantle of innocence.

**Thu** 1 Jn 1.5-7 • **Jn 1.29-34**

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and said: "Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

**Fri** Jn 1.35-42 • **1 Jn 1.9-2.2**

Jesus is the forgiveness for our sins, and not only for ours, but for those of the whole world.

**Sat** Jn 1.43-51 • **1 Jn 2.8-10**

The darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Whoever loves his brother remains in the light.

**SUN** Is 60.1-6 • **Mt 2.1-12**

**EPIPHANY** When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.

**Mon** 1 Jn 2.20-25 • **Mt 4.12-17**

Jesus said: Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.

**Tue** Mk 6.34-44 • **1 Jn 3.16-18**

Christ Jesus gave his life for us, and we too should give our lives for our brothers.

**Wed** 1 Jn 3.21-24 • **Mk 6.45-52**

When they saw Jesus walking on the water, the disciples were terrified. But at once he spoke to them saying, "Have courage, it's me. Don't be afraid."

**Thu** 1 Jn 4.1-6 • **Lk 4.14-22**

The Lord has sent me to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim freedom to those in captivity.

**11 Fri** Lk 5.12-16 • **1 Jn 4.7-10**

This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son for the forgiveness of our sins.

**12 Sat** Jn 3.22-30 • **1 Jn 4.11-14**

No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

**13 SUN** Is 55.1-11 • **Mk 1.7-11**

At Jesus' baptism, a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my joy is in you."

**14 Mon** Mk 1.12-15 • **1 Jn 4.15-18**

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

**15 Tue** Mk 1.16-20 • **1 Jn 4.19-21**

This is the command Christ gave us: whoever loves God must also love their brother.

**16 Wed** 1 Jn 5.1-4 • **Mk 1.21-28**

Jesus taught in the synagogue. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority.

**17 Thu** Mk 1.29-34 • **1 Jn 5.9-13**

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

**18 Fri** 1 Jn 5.14-16 • **Mk 1.35-39**

Jesus said to his disciples: Let us go elsewhere — to the nearby villages — so that I can proclaim the message there too.

**19 Sat** Mk 1.40-45 • **1 Jn 5.18-20**

We are in the One who is true, as we are in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

**20 SUN** 1 S 3.3-19 • **Jn 1.35-42**

Jesus asked his first disciples, "What do you want?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."

**21 Mon** Mk 2.1-12 • **Heb 1.1-6**

In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets in many different ways. But in our time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son.

**22 Tue** Heb 2.5-9 • **Mk 2.13-17**

Jesus said: I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

**23 Wed** Mk 2.18-22 • **Heb 2.10-15**

It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should, in bringing many sons to glory, make the author of their salvation, Jesus, perfect through suffering.

**24 Thu** Mk 3.1-6 • **Heb 2.17-18**

Because Christ himself suffered when he was put to the test, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

**25 Fri** Heb 3.5-8,13-14 • **Mk 3.13-21**

Jesus called to himself those he wanted, and he appointed twelve to be with him and to be sent out to preach.

**26 Sat** Mk 3.22-27 • **Heb 4.12-16**

The word of God is alive and active. It discerns the thoughts and desires of the human heart.

**27 SUN** 1 Co 7.29-31 • **Mk 1.14-20**

After being tempted in the desert, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God. "The time has come," he said, "the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news of the Gospel."

**28 Mon** Mk 3.31-35 • **Heb 5.5-9**

Jesus offered up prayer and entreaty to the one who could save him from death, he surrendered himself and he was heard.

**29 Tue** Mk 4.1-9 • **Heb 6.10-11,18b-20**

God has given us great encouragement to grasp the hope that is held out to us. It is an anchor for our souls.

**30 Wed** Heb 7.24-28 • **Mk 4.13-20**

Jesus said in a parable: Some, like seeds sown in good soil, listen to the Word of God, accept it, and bear much fruit.

**31 Thu** Mk 4.26-29 • **Heb 8.6-12**

The Lord says: Among my people, no one will need to teach their neighbour, saying, "Know the Lord!", for they shall all know me, from the smallest among them to the greatest.

This passage from Isaiah dates from a time when discouragement threatened the people of God. The city of Jerusalem, centre and high-point for a public celebration of God, had been rebuilt after the destruction of wartime, but it never regained its past splendour and renown.

The prophet receives a glimpse of what God intends for his city: it is time for her to rise up, to shine by welcoming God's light with joy. God wishes to be himself the splendour of his people (v. 19).

From the very beginning, Christians saw in these words a promise for the Church. She dares to make herself beautiful (cf. Rev 21,2) to welcome generously, to be a light in the darkness of peoples. And since the Church comes to life within each of us, in the yes our heart speaks to the Christ of communion, the words "Arise, shine!" are meant for each person as well.

● What does this passage tell us about that mystery of communion which is the Church? What can the words "Arise, shine!" mean in our life, and how can we rejoice in what God is accomplishing in and through us?



# February

## Meditating on the word

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

## Johannine Hours

**Matthew 21,28-31**

Johannine hours are suggested as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer, in the midst of our life at home. During the course of the day take a couple of hours to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow.

Afterwards, the group (3 to 10 people) meet together to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

**1 Fri** Heb 9.24-28 • Mk 4.30-34  
Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which is the smallest of seeds, but which, once it is sown, grows into the biggest plant of all.

**2 Sat** Mt 3.1-4 • Lk 2.22-40  
**PRESENTATION OF THE LORD** When Simeon saw the child Jesus, he praised God and said: Now, Lord, you can let your servant depart in peace as you promised. For my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared for all people to see.

**3 SUN** Dt 18.15-18 • Mk 1.21-28  
After hearing Jesus, people were amazed and said to each other, "Here is a new teaching, and with authority behind it: he even gives orders to unclean spirits and they obey him!"

**4 Mon** Mk 5.25-34 • Heb 10.5-10  
We have been made holy by Jesus Christ giving his life once and for all.

**5 Tue** Heb 10.11-18 • Mk 5.35-43  
Jesus said: Do not be afraid, only have faith.

**6 Wed** Mk 6.6-13 • Heb 10.22-25  
Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and in fullness of faith. Let us hold to the hope we profess, without wavering, for the one who has promised is faithful.

**7 Thu** Heb 10.32-38 • Mk 6.30-44  
Jesus and his disciples went to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. From every town, people hurried to the place and reached it before them. Seeing the large crowd, Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

**8 Fri** Mk 6.45-52 • Heb 11.1-10  
Faith is the assurance of things we hope for and the certainty of realities that are unseen.

**9 Sat** Mk 6.53-56 • Heb 11.13-16  
Our predecessors in faith recognized that they were exiles and nomads on this earth. In this way, they showed clearly that they were in search of their real homeland. And God has prepared a city for them.

**10 SUN** 1 Co 9.16-22 • Mk 1.29-39  
In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and went to a deserted place and there he prayed.

**11 Mon** Mk 7.31-37 • Heb 12.1-3  
Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, to run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.

**12 Tue** Heb 13.1-6 • Mk 8.27-30  
Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

**13 Wed** Mt 6.1-6, 16-18 • 2 Co 5.20-6.2  
**ASH WEDNESDAY** We are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were making his appeal through us. And we implore you in the name of Christ: be reconciled to God. Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

**14 Thu** Lk 9.22-25 • Jr 1.11-12, 17-19  
The Lord says: I watch over my Word to see it fulfilled.

**15 Fri** Mt 9.14-15 • Is 58.5-9a  
If your break unjust chains to let the oppressed go free, if you share your food with the hungry and shelter the homeless, then your light will break forth like the dawn, your wound will be quickly healed and the glory of the Lord will come behind you.

**16 Sat** Is 58.9b-12 • Lk 5.27-32  
Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.

**17 SUN** Gn 9.8-13 • Mk 1.12-15  
Jesus said: The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

**18 Mon** Jr 4.1-4 • Mt 25.34-40  
Jesus said: In truth I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

**19 Tue** Mt 6.7-14 • Is 55.10-11  
The Lord says: As the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return before having watered the earth and made it fertile, so is it with the word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me before having achieved its purpose.

**20 Wed** Lk 8.19-21 • Jr 2.1-5  
The Lord says to his people: I remember the faithful love of your youth, when you followed me through the desert.

**21 Thu** Mt 7.7-11 • Jr 2.10-13  
The Lord said of his people: They have forsaken me, the fount of living water, and have dug themselves cracked cisterns that will not hold water.

**22 Fri** Ezk 18.27-32 • Mt 5.23-24  
Jesus said: If you are bringing you offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.

**23 Sat** Mt 5.43-48 • Dt 30.11-14  
Moses told the people: What I command you today is not too difficult for you nor beyond your reach. The Word is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

**24 SUN** Rm 8.31-34 • Mk 9.2-10  
Jesus was transfigured in the presence of his disciples. And a cloud covered them with its shadow, and from the cloud a voice came, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

**25 Mon** Lk 6.36-38 • Jr 3.12-17  
The Lord says to his people: Return to me, for I am merciful.

**26 Tue** Is 1.16-18 • Mt 20.20-28  
Jesus said: Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant.

**27 Wed** Lk 15.1-24 • Jr 15.16  
Jeremiah said: When your words came, Lord, I devoured them: your word was my delight and the joy of my heart.

**28 Thu** Lk 15.25-32 • Jr 17.7-10  
Blessed are they who put their trust in the Lord. Such a person is like a tree planted by the water: in a year of drought it is untroubled and never ceases to bear fruit.

In his parable of the two sons Jesus reminds us that every human being has heard a call from God. But the story does not include a person who, after hearing the call, says yes at once and then does what is asked. Christ is fully familiar with the tortuous ways of the human heart, and so he speaks only of the person who says yes and does nothing, and of the other one who at first refuses but then does the will of his father.

What matters is not our first reaction to God's call, but the courage not to justify our own unwillingness. In daily life — and this parable takes as an example from ordinary life — could seem humiliating to do what we had earlier refused to do. Except for a child who knows that he will not have to explain or justify why it was first no, then yes. God will never ask this of us; he is not offended by our inability to say yes straightaway. God's only desire is that his loving will be done.

● Where can we find the simplicity of heart so as not to be bound by our prior refusals? How can I discover what I really want, in the depths of my heart?



## In Europe:

# Building an open society for the entire human family

Summer has been gone for a long while and still the hill of Taizé is alive with visitors. It is astonishing to see so many young adults when they are least expected. Particularly young Russians, those from the Baltic countries, or Romanians, whose first trip to the West is a real adventure.

After having experienced, throughout the last twelve months, a springtime of freedom in Europe, many come to Taizé to celebrate the springtime of nations.

They experience the joy of discovering one another and the surprise of seeing how close we are to one another despite the years of separation. For those who, until now, had been sealed off from the rest of the world, there is, in spite of the language problem, a springtime joy, full of promise, so characteristic of the meetings in Taizé.

More than ever, the diversity of the nations present represents a great richness. Sharing the same joy in meeting one another, even though we were strangers until now, is already a way of living out the beatitude "Happy the peacemakers: they will inherit the earth."

The experience of several days of sharing with people of radically different backgrounds is an impressive discovery for those who, until now, had suffered from inherited barriers and lived in situations where mistrust had become a reflex of survival.

For those from Romania who met in Taizé, Saxons, Magyars or native Romanians, it was the first time they had ever shared prayer together. They will be able to continue upon their return home. Their joy, however, was not without a note of gravity. Now that a year has passed since the changes, people are more aware of their responsibilities and the importance of future efforts.

"We have new freedoms but we don't know what to do with them; we don't know where to begin..., and this is true in all areas!" a young man from Latvia remarked.

## Struggling against discouragement

Preparations for the next European meeting in Prague, at the heart of the nations of Europe, are already providing a new impulse. It will coincide with the first anniversary of the changes in Czechoslovakia, and will help us to support one another in the struggle against discouragement.

It will be an opportunity to share the reflection that takes place each week in Taizé, and that each person is invited to continue when they return home, on the topic: building a society open to the human family.

A lasting commitment with others requires solid inner foundations. What fears still inhibit me? How can I let them be transformed? In order to trust, I need to be able to count on others. How can I recognize witnesses to faith around me?

Several young people from the Baltic countries had this to say: "We would have liked to have come with our grandmothers. If we are here, if we are believers, it's on account of our grandmothers. Most of them were deported to Siberia for years and years, fifteen years, seventeen years. In order to keep going, faith was all they had. They are simple women. They could never understand why they had to suffer so much, why their homes were destroyed, their husbands and sons killed. Some have come back; they are transparent, with no bitterness. They are living saints. Just a little of their faith would be enough to keep us going our whole life long."

Making the sources of trust accessible also means asking ourselves: how can we open our local community? How can we make of it a place of listening, of peace? How can common prayer in our churches speak even to those who have no religious training but who are searching, sometimes desperately, for meaning in their lives?

A young couple from Prague told how, in the difficult years, they began to welcome others to their home, around a simple meal that allowed them to listen to those who had no one to speak to about their questions and their difficulties.

Young people from Leipzig recalled how the prayer vigils for peace, begun by some of them seven years ago, brought together more and more young people, until the autumn of 1989 when they led to the large demonstrations that were decisive for the country.

The inner strength which comes from that source enabled people to continue in spite of fears and violence. Some Estonians explained how a small group was organized to visit young people in prison and to organize a halfway house so that they could live an independent life when they left prison.

Building a society open to the human family means widening the circle of our reflections. A European bank, economic aid, strengthening the cooperation between countries: to help things go forward, specialized skills and training is necessary.

But creating a more human society is not just the work of diplomats, bankers or businessmen. The creativity and the commitment of all are needed.

How can I situate my own studies and career choices in the context of the human family? How can a Europe with a new, peaceful face support development in the Southern hemisphere and help those far away who are anxiously awaiting other kinds of liberation? □





## Listening to the **CONTINENTS**

### Middle East

#### Prayer for peace

The disturbing events in the Middle East are constantly present in the prayer at Taizé. In each of the countries of that region we have friends, sometimes intimate friends, who have visited Taizé or who correspond in writing.

At the beginning of the All Saints weekend, priests from Lebanon celebrated the Sunday morning Eucharist at Taizé in Arabic. In the liturgy of the Christians of Lebanon, the words of consecration are spoken in Aramaic, the language of Jesus, just as he spoke them. That celebration brought the young people in Taizé close to the Lebanese people at this difficult time.

In July, a young woman from Malaysia returned to her country after several months in Taizé. Her flight stopped in Kuwait the day the country was invaded. She was held hostage for two weeks. Then, after long negotiations, she was able to leave with others for Baghdad, which involved a long journey by bus through the desert. From there, after another series of negotiations, they were brought to Amman, in Jordan. She was able to call Taizé before leaving for Malaysia. On the telephone she said, "After the first few days in Kuwait, a few of us were able to have a prayer in the place where we were

held. In the middle of the conflict, we were a group of Christians and Muslims praying together for peace. I knew that in Taizé people were praying for me and for all those in Kuwait."

### Poland

#### Creators of communion

In Wroclaw, each year in October there is a diocesan pilgrimage for young people with a day spent walking to the shrine of Trzebnica. A year ago, the preparation of the parishes of Wroclaw for the European meeting began with this pilgrimage.

Thousands of young people from all the parishes of the city and its surroundings walked and prayed together. This year, the young people of Wroclaw wanted to begin their preparations for the meeting in Prague at this same pilgrimage, held on Saturday, October 13. It was both a pilgrimage of thanksgiving for what took place last year in Poland and a way of turning towards the new stage of the pilgrimage of trust in Czechoslovakia.

The pilgrimage began with a prayer vigil in the church of Saint Mary na Piasku. In that church, since the European meeting last year, young people from throughout the city have been coming together regularly for a prayer at the invitation of the cardinal. That prayer is a stimulus to continue in all the different parishes where often young people meet each week. Following the vigil, the young people walked together to Trzebnica.

Young people from different cities of Poland came to Wroclaw for this day. They were able to share their ideas concerning the preparation of the meeting in Prague. After the summer meetings in Taizé, where so many Polish people were present, the preparation is very intense. Some of the pilgrims who will fill the six special trains already planned for Prague say that they will bring a great joy with them: they can finally accomplish in their own situation their deepest hope, to become creators of communion.

## France

#### Breaking with isolation

For several years now, we have been organizing a weekly prayer in our parish in Le Havre. We want it to be open to all the parishioners, both young and old, who are involved in different activities.

Some of the young adults devote time to welcoming the seafarers who stop over in this city, in a place where every day, between 6 and 11 pm, the sailors can break with the isolation of the long months spent on the sea in very difficult living conditions. In addition to all the services normally offered in a bar, they can also call home and above all meet other people and have a conversation with them.

In the parish, for the past two years a group of six young people has been helping youngsters with their school work, in a district where the majority are immigrants. At the beginning, nineteen children came together twice a week to do their homework.

Then, they realized they had to do more than just help the youngsters with their studies. They offered them cultural activities, trips during their free days. Today, about fifty children meet four evenings a week, and the parents are becoming interested in what their children are doing. They speak together, and the school teachers are interested in collaborating.

## Letter from Taizé

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